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SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTERS' DECLARATION ON U.S. IMMIGRATION
POLICY

11. (SBU) Summary: The Foreign Ministers of Central America, Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, and the Dominican Republic met in Antigua, Guatemala, on March 15, 2006. They reiterated their call for an hemispheric conference to promote "best practices" in temporary worker programs. They agreed to launch information campaigns warning people of the risks involved in undocumented migration. In connection with their ongoing desire to reduce the transaction costs of remittances, they expressed their concern about proposals to levy taxes on remittances. As for immigration reform in the United States, they staked out the following "fundamental positions" while acknowledging "every country's sovereign right to conduct its own immigration and security policy."

They further stated that:

-- Partial measures that only harden immigration policies are not a holistic solution to migration challenges nor do they fully take advantage of the opportunities.

-- New transnational threats (terrorism, narcotics trafficking, TIP, alien smuggling and other organized crime) require dialogue and cooperation among nations.

-- To the extent that receiving countries can guarantee legal, safe, and orderly immigration, "benefits will redound to all countries involved."

-- That temporary worker programs and the legalization of undocumented persons are essential to achieve legal, safe, and orderly immigration policies that are respectful of human rights. End Summary.

12. (U) The following is an informal translation of the declaration issued following the ministerial. (The original Spanish text was faxed to WHA/CEN.)

(Begin translation)

Joint Declaration of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs from the MesoAmerican Countries, Dominican Republic, Colombia and Ecuador.

Antigua Guatemala, March 15, 2006

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Senior Officials of the MesoAmerican Countries, Dominican Republic, Colombia, and Ecuador, met in the city of Antigua Guatemala on March 15, 2006, with the aim of following up the meeting of Cartagena de Indias that took place on February 13, relating to joint actions in benefit of the migrant population of their countries, as well as to collaborate to achieve a better

management of the migration phenomenon in their own countries and other States.

The Ministers praised the results of the Meeting of Experts from Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union on Migration, held in Cartagena de Indias on March 1 and 2, where the following issues were addressed: Treatment, Rights and Integration of Migrants; New Approaches to Migration Policies; Irregular Migration and the Struggle against Trafficking of Persons; and, Remittances.

Considering the importance of the establishment of bilateral programs for migrant workers, the Ministers reiterated their interest and disposition to hold a Hemispheric Conference to promote better practices on the subject. In this context, they agreed to carry out a comparative study about procedures and current situation of their respective processes, that would allow the setting of guidelines and homogenous procedures for the application as well as for the follow-up and extension of these projects, so that they could be shared with those countries that have not benefited from these models for regulation of migration. The Government of Guatemala will be responsible for coordinating the elaboration of such a study.

Considering the risks involved for the people undertaking undocumented migration, they agreed to strengthen the cooperation between States through the means of specific information campaigns that have the collaboration of the organizations and entities related to this subject.

Acknowledging the positive socio-economic contribution of migrants in the receiving countries and with respect to their communities of origin, they reiterated the importance of developing integral migration policies that include an

ordered, safe, and efficient management of the migratory flows in accordance with the labor market demands and with respect for the human and labor rights of the migrants. They also expressed the importance of intensifying efforts to reduce the cost of sending remittances. In this sense, the Ministers and Senior Officials expressed their concern about the possibility that these remittances would be taxed and called for reconsideration of such measures.

The Ministers and Senior Officials took note of, and thanked, the Technical Work Group on Migration, composed of Ambassadors and Senior Officials of the respective Foreign Ministries, for the report on the current state of the debate about immigration reform in the United States of America and acknowledged the importance and transcendence of the current debate.

In this sense, they agreed to use all diplomatic and political channels to communicate to the relevant actors in the United States of America the fundamental positions of this group of nations:

-- That, respecting the sovereign right of the countries to conduct their migration and security policy, partial measures that only consider the strengthening of the immigration policies do not represent an integral solution to deal with the challenges, nor to take advantage of the opportunities, that the migration phenomenon poses.

-- That, in this twenty first century, new threats to the security of States, such as terrorism, narcotics trafficking, trafficking of persons, and other forms of organized crime, can only be addresses properly through dialogue and cooperation among nations.

-- That the growing relation between migration, security, and frontier problems at the global level is a current reality in our relations; in consequence, it is necessary to harmonize these three elements when we formulate our policies on the migration issue.

-- That the international implications of this phenomenon

require actions and compromises between regions and neighbor countries that, in the context of international cooperation, should be guided by the principle of shared responsibility.

-- That, to the extent that recipient countries have adequate mechanisms that guarantee migration that is legal, safe, orderly and respectful of persons' human rights, dialogue and international cooperation in this matter will benefit all the countries involved and, in particular, it will contribute to improved attention to the diverse security concerns that we share.

-- That, the establishment of schemes for temporary workers, along with the regularization of the immigrant status of undocumented persons, are essential elements in achieving migration processes that are legal, safe, orderly and respectful of human rights.

The Ministers instructed their Ambassadors and the Technical Work Group on Migration to continue their work and keep their Ministries steadfastly informed. They also agreed to remain in steadfast contact in order to continue evaluating progress on the migration issue.

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Senior Officials expressed to the people and government of Guatemala their gratitude for all of courtesies and hospitality rendered during the meeting.

Antigua, Guatemala, March 15, 2006.

(End translation)

13. (SBU) Comment: Although we were pleased with the moderate tone set by Guatemalan Foreign Minister Briz as host, the press characterized this ministerial's outcome as "bland," and immigrant rights' groups criticized the ministers for their non-confrontational stance, particularly with respect to what they consider to be the most objectionable elements of the Sensenbrenner bill (the wall and the criminalization of immigration violations).
DERHAM